

The Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina

Answers to Prepared Walkabout Questions for the Episcopal Nominees (II): Mark Lawrence¹

QUESTION ONE

Mark, one of the concerns being expressed about you is the question of how you will be able to develop the relationships and the trust necessary to lead the diocese given that it is a relatively new environment for you. How will you deal with that potentially steep learning curve?

This is a most interesting concern you have about me. Interesting because the prefacing sentence suggests to me quite a different concern than the subsequent question that is actually asked. Let me tell you how I intend to respond. First, I will answer the question implicit in the first sentence putting it into a straightforward question. Then, secondly, I will answer the question actually asked, and will try to do so in such a way that I address, albeit covertly, what I think might be an unasked question behind the concern.

1) Mark, given that South Carolina is a relatively new environment for you, how will you be able to develop the relationships and the trust necessary to lead the diocese?

Well the first thing that needs to be acknowledge is the kindness of the one who phrased the question with the words “relatively new environment”. Frankly, it is a radically new environment. I’ve never lived in the South. And what I’ve gleaned of it from my brief travels or from the Southern writers I’ve read over the years may not only be wrong, it may be dreadfully wrong. For all I know it may be as foreign to me as the swamps and the low country are from the topography of the West with its deserts, high mountains, and red rock canyons. But I’m eager to learn. A further difficulty is the unique fact that I know no one here intimately. I have acquaintances and colleagues at best. If elected bishop I have no one to whom I am a debtor—and everyone to whom I am a servant. So I would face a tremendous challenge. Needing to lead a diocese in a time of ecclesiastical crisis, neither knowing anyone, nor being known by anyone in any profound way.

What then to do if I’m elected? Since you have in place a deanery model of diocesan life, I would purpose the following: I would schedule a time to meet with the clergy in each of the six deaneries. This would be a time for me to hear from the priests and deacons the needs, concerns, and hopes. It would also be a time for me to share what I believe are my strengths and weaknesses, my concerns for the church, and my hopes

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for our life together as brothers and sisters in the ordained ministry of Christ's Church. (We must not lose sight of the mission Jesus has called us to exercise— just because we are caught up in frying the smaller fish of ecclesiastical controversy—this is no excuse for not being fishers of men).

I would also need to schedule such deanery gatherings with the laity for similar meetings. You and I would both need to make concerted effort to develop the relationships and trust that would lead to effective ministry. It would not be incumbent upon me alone. We would be in this together. I believe it was Clovis Chappel who once told the story of the young man called to a famous pulpit..."Don't worry, we've never let any of our preachers fail." I'll be glad to make the first overture, but I cannot accomplish the task alone. I'll tell you that right up front. Though I'd also tell you if past practice is any indication, I'll probably try.

This would not be the first time I will have stepped into a very new environment from where I have been before. When I left St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Shafter, California in 1984 I went from the rural farmlands of the great Central Valley, where we lived on a farm 2 miles from town, surrounded by grape vineyards, cotton fields, and fruit trees—a hog pen and chicken coop in the back—and stepped right into the devastated steel mill towns of the Mon Valley. It was an inner city environment, economically blighted, and spiritually broken. For instance, when our curate at St. Stephen's, Fr. Kevin Higgins was preparing to leave as a missionary to Pakistan, Judge Leonard Staisy, a prior State Senator and a member of our parish said to him, "Kevin your making a step up, you're going from the 4th to 3rd world." At my first clergy gathering a priest from the suburbs said to me, "Welcome to the diocese, sorry you're in McKeesport." I must confess I felt an ungodly pride when 6 years later St. Stephen's was bigger than the parish at which he had been serving.

When I returned to my home town of Bakersfield 13 years later the affluence and materialism of California, and what seemed to me its obsession with recreation, was as shocking to me then as the depression in the Mon Valley was when I first arrived there. So I'm really not that much of a stranger to new environments. I don't come to a new place with big visions of grandeur. I come first to listen and learn, and then to share and serve—which Jesus suggested after all is the heart of Christian leadership.

2) How will you deal with the potentially steep learning curve?

Frankly I'm not very good at touting myself directly. I have to come at these things by stealth. I could tell you that I am committed to being a life-long learner (not least of the reasons is because I started out so slowly), but that sounds to my ear as platitudinous, and makes even me want to yawn. So allow me a different approach. I come from a working class background. My father's own father died when my father was two. Struck by lightning that rolled like a fireball into his Arkansas barn. It temporarily paralyzed my great uncle against the wall; it killed my paternal grandfather. So my grandmother went to work as a schoolteacher taking her two young boys with her to the country schools at which she taught. When the dust bowl of the 30s hit, she and her two sons, with others in her extended family, trucked out to California...my father, a 14-year-old kid. His hair sheared in the shape of a bowl earned him and those like him, the shunning name, Okie.

So he grew up fiercely independent...learned to pull himself up by the bootstraps, and he modeled that to me.

My mother's family comes from a long line of California dirt farmers. They tended to be short on words and long on work. You can't blame the Coombs clan when I go to preaching too long. This is to suggest that I have a strong work ethic and that I come by it honestly. Maybe too strong at times, and God on more than one occasion has had to remind me that things in the Kingdom of God run by the engine of grace. Work is merely the steel wheel on the rail. It is the engine of grace that pulls the freight. But I hear your question as asking me about the work—dealing with the steep learning curve.

One of the surest indications of how a person will deal with things in the future is how he has dealt with things in the past. I have tended to throw myself wholeheartedly into whatever I have felt passionately about, or called to do. As I look back upon my life I've done this from earliest childhood to the present—whether collecting reptiles and insects, backpacking, wrestling, studying literature or theology, being a priest—vicar and rector, or being asked to step in at the last minute to teach Church History at a seminary. I've done things with a voracious appetite and at times a dreadful intensity. As I mentioned in my brief spiritual autobiography, I came into this world striving and have been striving ever since. If I'm called to be your bishop and I fail to make the grade, it will not be from lack of effort, study, personal sacrifice nor, I trust, God's grace. It has been my experience that when he has called me to a task He has equipped me sufficiently to get it done. Certainly I have a lot to learn about the world and culture of South Carolina, and I'm eager to learn.

Now having acknowledged that there are many things about the landscape I don't know, I have to say this in my defense. Ultimately the diocese of South Carolina is made up of clergy and lay persons. That is, it is made up of people. And people, well people are much the same all over the world. The day before the deputation from your Search Committee flew out to St. Paul's...Allison and I drove down to the Santa Monica Mountains. She dropped me off at the trailhead and I hiked up to Sandstone Peak. When I got to the top seeking isolated perspective I found instead some Japanese talking away. I couldn't understand a word. Then one said something to another and they all broke out in hearty, good-natured laughing...I thought to myself, "you know people laugh and cry in much the same language all over the world." The truth is bishops often love the Church, priests love their parishes, churchwardens love their buildings, altar guilds love their vessels, but God loves people. And when I'm living close to him, so do I. Along with this I love his world, it is filled with wonder.

With the exception of my 16 years in Western Pennsylvania I've spent at least some of almost every summer since I was a kid in the high country of the Sierra. It wasn't until last summer I got to high and remote enough country at just the right time to see Bighorn Sheep. Two herds. You can count on one hand the number of people who have spotted California Bighorn Sheep in the Sierra. Some day, if I'm called to the low country here, maybe I'll get deep enough in the swamps and woods—deep enough, as James Kilgo put it—deep enough for Ivorybills.

Question Two: The Diocese of South Carolina ranks at first or near first in every measurable category of vitality: growth, attendance, giving, etc. Why do you believe this has been the case, and how do you foresee continuing this positive trend?

I may be the least qualified to speak on this matter, living three thousand miles away I see you, as the popular song of a few years back noted: "From a distance." But the first thing I see is Leadership.

Leadership—Bishops: Godly, faithful bishops from Gray Temple, & Fitzsimmons Allison, to Bishops Salmon and Skilton. They have stood for and proclaimed the Gospel, the faith once delivered to the Saints and embodied in the creeds. Along with this is that Bishop Salmon is the quintessential executive leader. I first got a glimpse of this when he led a clergy conference in the Diocese of Pittsburgh in the 1990s. He struck me as a man who was most adept at understanding how "systems" work and how to work within or even create an effective system. As I look at your diocese now, this perception was right. Along with this giftedness, he has also brought two crucial thrusts to the diocese of South Carolina:

1) Stewardship—the 10-10-10 model. It is easily communicated and easily understood. It puts the emphasis on the parish. It is after all the parishes that grow the diocese, not the diocese which grow the church. Excessive parish assessments cut growth off at the knees. It keeps the parish from not only staffing for growth, but sometimes from staffing for maintenance. Along with this pragmatic genius, it has biblical foundations. It is an important thing to recognize that along with this practice being practical, it is also faithful—and God honors what God commands.

2) Youth Ministry—the emphasis on each parish having a vital youth ministry was and is the right vision at the right time. When I was a kid growing up parents brought their children to church. It is often the case today that children bring their parents to church. And those parents that do bring their children to church want an effective program for their children. So what do you need to continue this growth trajectory? Bishop Salmon! Some of you know Bishop Salmon, Bishop Salmon is a friend of yours, and Mark Lawrence is no Bishop Salmon! But I would seek to keep these things central in your diocesan life.

Leadership of the Clergy:

I do not mean this to sound in anyway solicitous, or worse campaigning—but from what I've seen in the clergy on the Search Committee, Standing Committee, the clergy deputation at the last two General Conventions, from pamphlets I've picked up at a few of the Charleston churches when we toured, and even a recent posting from your Dean on titusonine, you have some of the most outstanding clergy in the church—young and old alike, (yes I have a conservative bias). Some have taken leadership in the life of the larger church and I believe God has honored that and blessed you for it. Others are obviously leading their parishes in strong engaging ministries; (one of these is a candidate in this election).

Now to a Pet Peeve of mine. On a national and on a diocesan level we in the Episcopal Church too often celebrate the unique, the peculiar and the specialized ministry. We do this over and over in our church publications. St. Swithin's near the Swamp opens a soup kitchen and it's on the front page. St. Anne's has a hospice ministry and there are write ups and pictures. But too often the solid day in day out ministry of the vital parish goes unmentioned and uncelebrated. The sacrificing work of the steadfast Rector or Vicar goes unsung...unwritten. This ought not to be. The diocese needs to keep raising up, recruiting and holding on to and encouraging good priests—young and old alike. While we're at it, let's not forget good deacons (the permanent diaconate). In my last two parishes I've had three of the best deacons you can imagine. They've done a great job of ministry in the parish and often ministered to me, the rector. I've been most thankful for them.

Laity—The Ministry of the Laity:

The only lay persons I've come to know here have been on the Search Committee and Standing Committee, but they have been impressive witnesses to the life of Christ here in this diocese. I did, however, get on your website. And there under Programs was an impressive list of organizations and ministries—Brotherhood of St. Andrew (prayer, study and service), Cursillo (make a friend, be a friend, and bring a friend to Christ), Daughters of the King (prayer and service), ECW, ERD, Faith Alive (personal testimony—“This much I know, once I was blind but now I see), Hispanic Ministry (missionary eyes and opportunity), Order of St. Luke (healing of Christ for body, mind and spirit), Kairos Prison Ministry (“as much as you've done it to the least of these my brethren...”), et al. Each of these had a lay person as their contact person. Some years ago I attended a continuing education series at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. The lecturer was a professor at Carnegie-Mellon University. He was an up and coming writer in the field of Business/Leadership. He has since published an important book on Followership. Followership in his lexicon is not being a lemming. It is when workers lead through their effective followership on the job. He cited examples from the corporate and public sectors. We talk a lot about leadership these days, but he settled on a key component of institutional transformation—effective followership. The church historian and theologian Martin Marty once referred to a study that noted that the average Episcopalian invites someone to church once every 33 years. You're obviously well above the curve on this one.

According to the Religious Congregation & Membership in the U. S., Episcopalians are in 5th place in all religious bodies in Charleston-North Charleston area. From 1990 to 2000 you went from 6th place to 5th place. Of those in the places in front of you, two declined in that decade, Southern Baptists (-22.7 %), and United Methodists (-4%). Two increased, Roman Catholics (+ 37.6%), and Presbyterians (+9.6%). Episcopalians in Charleston-North Charleston increased in the last decade by +14.2 %. Clearly your diocese is an exciting place to be. You are moving in the right direction from the leadership of your bishops and clergy to the effective followership of the lay persons who are not just sitting in the pews but effectively ministering to those in the world. As

these lay persons continue to be equipped the church and diocese will continue to grow.

Question Three: The Diocese of South Carolina is among those dioceses which have requested Alternative Primatial Oversight. Do you support this decision? If so, what issues does it raise? Please make reference in your answer to: a) the authority of Holy Scripture b) catholic ecclesiology c) Anglican identity.

I too am a member of a diocese that has asked for Alternative Primatial Oversight, though I was not a member of the Standing Committee that took the action. When it came out in the newspaper that week I thought, well I'll need to address it on Sunday. I read the lectionary lessons for the coming Sunday, but there was nothing to address the subject there. But in one of those serendipitous convergence I have come to expect while traveling this road in the Kingdom of God, the collect for the Sunday after the Standing Committee of the Diocese of San Joaquin asked for alternative primatial oversight, reads as follows:

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through (BCP, p. 230)

This collect, most likely composed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, is rooted in the teaching of the New Testament, particularly Ephesians 2:20-22 and 4:3-4. It is also rooted in one of the essential teachings of the Anglican Reformation—that no human assembly or institution may claim to be the Church of God unless it is founded on the teaching of the apostles. The apostolic Church is founded not on institutional or sacramental continuity alone. What is often referred to, as “Apostolic Succession” is more than merely the laying on of hands from bishop to bishop in sacramental a chain back to the apostles. Equally essential for the church is the teaching of the apostles and prophets succeeding from one generation to another. This is stated clearly in Articles XIX, and XX in the Articles of Religion, (see BCP, page 871).

What is being asserted in these two articles is the priority of Holy Scripture over the authority of the Church. The church as St. Paul taught in his Letter to the Ephesians, and as the above collect ascribes, is built upon the teaching of the apostles as found in Holy Scripture; and it is called to live under and in obedience to the Word of God. The uniqueness of the Anglican and Episcopalian understanding of the Church is that it has held both of these understandings toward the nature of the Church at the same time. It has held the catholic argument that institutional continuity is essential for the identity of the Church. This continuity is sacramentally and visibly expressed in the office of the bishop, the episcopacy. It has also believed in the need to conform to the teaching of the apostles, grounding our belief and practice in the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. Consequently we have been eager to seek unity—striving to maintain the visible unity of the Church, reaching out to Roman Catholics in one direction, and towards our

Protestant brothers and sisters in the other, but not seeking this unity at the expense of either of these two truths of the Church. Holding institutional continuity and the need to be under the ever correcting and reforming authority of the Bible. If the questioned should be raised, as it often is, as to who interprets Holy Scripture when different factions or parties in the church disagree, the answer has traditionally been, we turn to the consensus of the faithful. So interpretation of debated texts of scripture is not up to one individual priest or bishop, one local congregation, or even a provincial or national church. We need in such a case to seek the consensus of the faithful through out the worldwide Anglican Communion, and even to give appropriate regard to how the historic church has understood such disputes, as well as what the various branches of Christendom teach on the matter.

The unity of the church needs this considered reflection. Even more essential to our unity with one another is the source of all unity in the Church. As John Stott has observed, "Christian unity arises from our honoring one Father, one Savior, and one indwelling Spirit." So fundamental to our unity with one another in the church is our unity with the Holy Trinity. It is this unity which raises a series of elementary questions. How can we foster a unity pleasing to God if we deny the very revelation God has given us about himself or the Christian life? How can we be eager for unity with one another if we deny the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ? How can we say the Holy Spirit is leading the Church through the parliamentary procedures of General Convention if the results of these procedures deny the very truth the Spirit of God has revealed through the teachings of the apostles and prophets? Is it not upon this very teaching that the Church is founded? Of course. It is upon the doctrine of the apostles that the church is built and only upon their doctrine that we can maintain our unity.

I need to say it clearly, I am eager for such unity. A unity drawn not along narrow lines of biblical interpretation, but from an inclusive and comprehensive use of the Bible. I am most eager to remain a Christian in the Anglican tradition. This is a tradition, which as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has recently stated, has maintained "the absolute priority of the Bible, a catholic loyalty to the sacraments and a habit of cultural sensitivity and intellectual flexibility." Unfortunately The Episcopal Church has frayed in recent years this strand woven of three cords by our misguided passion to be culturally sensitive and intellectually flexible. In its desire to be perceived as relevant to one segment of our culture it has lost its commitment to the Gospel—which is the only hope we have to offer this segment or any other for that matter. In its desire to be more relevant than thou, TEC has cast aside scriptural faithfulness, particularly the broad and demonstrable teachings of the New Testament that would convict our lifestyle of sin, and call into question our overly permissive approach to morality. Even more disturbing is our grave disregard of fundamental Christian doctrines such as the nature of God, the uniqueness of Christ, the integrity and unity of the Spirit's work, and the need of humankind for the redemptive work of the cross—at times assuming our sexual proclivities, given by nurture or nature, are, by that fact, necessarily God-given. I am personally saddened for those gay and lesbian Christians within the church that so much of the debate has focused upon homosexual behavior and relationships. It has too often given way to bigotry or to an easy self-righteousness among heterosexuals.

Nevertheless, it is for now the place where the battle lines have been drawn. Regardless of how I wish it had been elsewhere, it is where the larger issues are being debated, leading to a crisis in the worldwide Anglican Communion. The unity of 80 million Christians is at stake. As Archbishop Williams has recently stated, "...the decision of the Episcopal Church to elect a practising gay man as a bishop was taken without even the American church itself...having formally decided as a local Church what it thinks about blessing same-sex partnerships."

So when the Standing Committee of our diocese, like the Diocese of South Carolina ask for alternative primatial oversight it is because all due parliamentary procedure to convince The Episcopal Church that it has erred have proved fruitless. Like an addictive or dysfunctional family, this pursuit of "cultural sensitivity" has led to destructive patterns of behavior. So perhaps our Standing Committee's action of disassociation, along with eight other dioceses at present, will demonstrate the seriousness of TEC's dysfunction. I love this Church enough to practice what those in the counseling professions call tough-love. Underneath all the discussions of human sexuality, our message is this, The Episcopal Church, in its obsession to be what it has termed inclusive, has excluded the priority of Holy Scripture, as well as the historical continuity of the catholic faith. Of course I would not want to make a similar error in either my passion for scripture or in my commitment towards historic catholicity. I am an Anglican—I want all three: the Primacy of the Bible, historic continuity, and cultural sensitivity and intellectual flexibility. This, then, deals with two of your requests—that, in my response to your I question I address the authority of Holy Scripture and our Anglican identity. I have not to my satisfaction, however, adequately dealt with the issue of catholic Eccelsiology. I'm not sure others in the church have either. We have asked the Archbishop to respond without presenting a thorough doctrine of ecclesiology from which to act. The Stanford economist Paul Romer once said, "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste." It would be unfortunate if we do not use this current crisis in the church to do some hard thinking about what God is calling the Anglican Communion to become in the 21st Century. The Windsor Report identified four instruments of Unity, The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Counsel (ACC), and the Primates Meeting. Of these four instruments, three are less than a 150 years old, and two are less than 40! The Lambeth Conference first met in 1867 (over the protests and concerns of the Archbishop of York—fear of broadening jurisdictional authority); the ACC was established after Lambeth in 1968; and the Primates first gathered in 1979. These would seem to be ways of the Anglican Communion trying to adapt its practical life and ecclesiology to globalization—an increasing global church trying to come to grips with a global age. Now we've entered further into such an era, what Thomas Friedman has described as a flat world, (see his book, *The World Is Flat*). It strikes me as I reflect back on General Convention in 2006 that many in the church were like the union bosses in the steel mills in the late '70s and early '80s. Getting more for the workers in the short term but not recognizing that the company was investing more and more abroad, and not investing in updating the mills themselves. The world was changing and they didn't fully grasp the change. There's no going back to isolationism in the world or the church. The mantra of autonomy is a hindrance to the future. When

farmers in the San Joaquin valley decide whether to put in a cherry orchard they evaluate the market in Japan. When a farmer decides about a crop of cotton he needs to know what's being grown in Turkey and Egypt, and the demands in China. Those of you in the business world know a similar thing is true for you. This present crisis in the Anglican Communion is a sign that among other things we have entered into an ever-flattening world. We need to have an Anglican ecclesiology that takes seriously this new era.

Alternative Primatial Oversight is a temporary gasp for air—necessary perhaps, but temporary. I'm in favor of some new and hard thinking about the way the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion lives out our unity in Christ. There is no going back to pre-2003. Time to chart a path for the future. At this point the "conservatives" are being progressive, and the "progressives" strike me as digging in their heels for the past. Time to move ahead. I only hope The Episcopal Church can catch up.

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